**How to Develop a Perfect Society Name:**

**Date: Block:**

**Directions:**

1. **READ the introduction and the story**
2. **ANNOTATE while you read the introduction AND the story (circle unknown words, underline important phrases, “talk back” by writing your thoughts)**
3. **ANSWER the questions at the end of the reading.**

Talk Back Below!

The earliest Chinese dynasty, the Shang, was overthrown by the Zhou (who claimed that their power came from the gods – this is called the **Mandate of Heaven)**. The Zhou period was a time of change in China. For the first time in Chinese history, the laws were written down. At the same time, the power of the emperors declined. Princes who controlled large pieces of land challenged the emperors and fought wars among themselves for more territory.

**Confucius**, a teacher who lived between 551 and 479 BCE, opposed the aggressive behavior and constant warfare of the princes. He believed in respect for the family, respect for your parents above all (this is called **filial piety**). **Confucius** spoke of five personal virtues (morals): charity, courtesy, good faith, hard work, and kindness. He was concerned about how people got along with one another. **Confucius** also understood that no two people are alike. Thus he wondered how a government could pass a law that would perfectly meet the needs of many different citizens. In this story, he talks with a former student who had disagreed with him and left his school.

**“Welcome, Chen,” said Confucius. “I am pleased to see you. You have been away for many months.”**

**Chen hesitated. “I did not think that you would want to speak to me because I disagreed with you.”**

**“You were wrong, Chen,” replied Confucius softly. “I am truly happy that you have come back to my school.”**

**“But Master, by disagreeing with you, I have disobeyed you. And you teach that it is important for us to obey our elders. The wife must obey her mother-in-law. Sons and daughters must obey their parents, and the younger brothers and sisters must obey the older ones. The pupil must obey the teacher. I heard you teach this many times, and I still do not know why this must be so.”**

**Confucius answered, “We should follow the advice and counsel of older people because they have lived longer and therefore have acquired (gained) more knowledge based on experience. Most important of all, we must obey them because they, in turn, are bound to help us become better people.”**

**“And how can they help us do that?” Chen asked.**

**“They must provide good examples for everyone to follow,” Confucius responded. “They must also teach us wisdom, love, and courage.”**

**“But are older people always wiser?” asked Chen. “Suppose my father sets a poor example for me. Must I accept his bad judgment?”**

**Confucius shook his head. “No. Chen, if you are absolutely sure that your father is wrong, you may gently try to persuade him to change his mind. But even if he refuses, you must still give him the respect that is his due.”**

**“But why must I show respect to someone whose thinking is filled with errors?”**

**“Because,” answered Confucius, “there is a law that all human beings must respect: The family is everything. Within the family, the younger must respect the older. This must always be so, even when the older are in error.”**

**“I have another question, Master. Why should *one* all-powerful man rule our country without limits on what he can do? Are we not better off with many princes controlling their own land? In this way, no one will have too much power.”**

**“Chen, power should not be divided or shared. The emperor is like the head of a family. He must be the one responsible for running the entire country. And he, more than any other, must set a good example for all his subjects.”**

**“But where does the emperor’s authority to rule come from?”**

**“Heaven had decreed (said or made) it so. Our ancient books tell us that the emperor is put here on earth to do the will of the gods. No one else has the power to carry out their wishes.”**

**“How can we know if the emperor rules well?” asked Chen.**

**Confucius answered, “The person who spends most of his time attending to business, keeps his promises, doesn’t spend money foolishly, shows kindness to his subjects, and treats all people fairly is a good ruler. We must learn how to develop a perfect society. The ruler must learn to be fair to his subjects. Parents and children must learn to love one another. The young must learn to respect the old.”**

**Chen sighed. “If society is to become perfect, it seems that everyone must play an important role. Yet people seem to offend one another more than they please one another. Is there some way to teach people how not to offend others?”**

**“That is a wise question,” said Confucius. “Yes, there is such a way. People must be taught a simple rule: They must never do to others what they would not want others to do to them. If people would only learn this and practice it, they would never give offense to anyone. This one rule, if practiced, would move us a great deal closer to the perfect society.”**

**Chen thought for a moment and said, “Master, by behaving toward me with patience, kindness, and understanding, you have just taught me the true value of righteous (respectable) behavior. By not treating me as you would not wish to be treated, you have helped me to understand that which I never understood before. You once said that everyone is born in order to play an important role. For the first time, I am beginning to understand the role that I am expected to fulfill.”**

**Confucius smiled and said, “Chen, with your new wisdom and understanding, you have just brought our society a step closer to perfection.”**

**Questions for Review: Please answer ON A SEPARATE SHEET OF PAPER**

1. What is the Mandate of Heaven? What is filial piety?
2. Why did Confucius think it was so important that people get along?
3. Why should the young obey the old?
4. What did Chen think was righteous (respectable) behavior?

**Activities: Choose TWO of the following to answer…**

1. Imagine that you are Chen. You are having a discussion with Confucius. With which of his ideas do you agree? With which of his ideas do you disagree? Explain why for each.
2. Chen had been away from Confucius’ school for many months. If you were in his place, would you have returned? Why or why not?
3. Confucius believed strongly in the Mandate of Heaven. What do you think of this idea? Could the mandate be applied to the United States government? Explain.
4. Confucius spoke of a perfect society. Describe his perfect society. Now describe your idea of a perfect society. What are the similarities and differences?
5. Confucius’ school was very different from yours. What do you think life in Confucius’ school was like? What would be the similarities? Differences?